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LENIN ON RELIGION

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RELIGION

BY

V. I. LENIN

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THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION AND THE RENEGADE KAUTSKY

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INTRODUCTION

ATHEISM is a natural and inseparable part of Marxism, of the theory and practice of scientific socialism. In accordance with their fundamental philosophical outlook, Marx and Engels always called themselves Materialists.

In developing their materialist philosophy, Marx and Engels had at first thoroughly to analyse the ideas which came from the religious world of thought. As early as 1844, Marx coined the phrase: "The criticism of religion is the beginning of all criticism." This analysis was accomplished with such completeness that later the atheistic character of their mature philosophy seemed to require little emphasis and was taken for granted. The same is true of many Marxists and not least of Lenin. It is not an accident therefore, that the works of our great masters, Marx, Engels and Lenin, contain no complete and systematic statement of their proletarian Atheism. It is not usual to talk of obvious facts.

This also explains why atheism has played such a small part in the labour movement generally. In the early days of the labour movement the mass of the workers turned away from religion. In 1874, Engels wrote: "Atheism is practically an accepted fact among European labour parties." Lenin, in 1909, spoke in a similar strain of "class-conscious Social-Democrats, who are of course atheists." Later on however, this sturdy secularism of the labour movement began to deteriorate and the Social-Democratic parties, in their effort to win the support of the petty-bourgeoisie, began to pander to the religious prejudices of the latter.

While the first programme of the Social-Democrats of Germany (the Eisenach programme of 1869) clearly and correctly stated the demand for the separation of Church from State, and School from the Church, the Gotha programme of the Socialist Labour Party (1875) contained the formulation: "Religion is declared a private matter." This opened wide the door to the opportunists. In his commentary

on this programme, Marx wrote that the workers' party should try rather " to liberate the conscience from the spectre of religion," and added wrathfully: " But they don't think it proper to overstep the bourgeois mark." The German Social-Democratic Party kept to the same idea in its Erfurt programme of 1891. Point 6 of that programme runs: " Ecclesiastical and religious bodies are to be considered as private associations." Engels had previously recommended the formula: " All religious bodies without exception are to be treated *by the State* as private associations. They are not to receive support from public funds or exercise any influence over public education." The Social-Democratic Party ignored Engels' recommendation and even withheld it from the party membership until October, 1901.

In practice the point as adopted by the Party was interpreted as meaning: religion is a private affair; that is to say, that it was not the concern of the Party as to whether a member was religious or not. This applied to the Social-Democratic Parties in other countries as well, with the result that the idea gained ground among the Social-Democrats that Marxism was not anti-religious. Moreover, various sections of the socialist movement arose which claimed to derive their socialist principles from religion. For example, the leaders of the Socialist Party of America, the Independent Labour Party in England, etc. Thus the very principles of socialism were converted by the opportunists into a means of fostering religious superstitions among the workers. Since the war, Social-Democracy has avowedly and definitely repudiated Marxism and has taken a religious turn. It is necessary therefore to re-state the attitude of the Communists towards religion. This attitude is well explained in the collection of articles by Lenin on this subject contained in this small volume. From these the reader will also obtain Lenin's view on how to counteract the religious doping of the workers.

The collection here given contains the most important articles and letters written by Lenin on the questions of religion in the period between 1902 and 1922. It should be remarked that in his comprehensive work, *Materialism and Empirico-Criticism*,* written in 1908, Lenin analysed the idealist philosophy which fosters religious views and in so doing dealt thoroughly with dialectical materialism.

* Published in English by the publishers of this collection.

The first two articles (written in 1905 and 1909 respectively) represent the most complete statement which we possess by any leading Marxist on the attitude of the modern working-class movement to religion. The third article, like the second, deals with the debate on religion in the Tsarist Duma (1909), and pays special attention to the feeble and reactionary attitude of the liberal bourgeoisie to the reactionary church. The fourth article was written in 1902 on the occasion of a dispute between orthodox believers and a liberal-minded member of the aristocracy which elicited a valuable admission from the faithful, as to " what is the good of religion."

The necessity for unceasing struggle on behalf of atheism within and outside the party was emphasised by Lenin in the article which he wrote as an introduction to the first number of the scientific Bolshevik journal, *Under the Banner of Marxism* (1922), and which we have reprinted as the fifth in this series. We should note, in this, the demand for a united front of all consistent atheists and materialists. The article on Tolstoy (1908) will come as something of a shock to the intellectuals of Western Europe, familiar as they are with books about Tolstoy, since it says in a few sentences what all those thick volumes left unsaid. Proceeding from his basis of historical materialism Lenin goes to the very root of the religious ideas on which Tolstoyanism is founded and at the same time analyses the revolutionary importance of the peasantry.

The two letters from Lenin to Maxim Gorky, written in 1913, are a valuable part of this collection. The letters are directed against the revival of an emotional variety of socialism, with a religious tendency, as preached at that time, after the defeat of the 1905 revolution, by the group of " God-seekers " which had gathered around Lunacharski and Gorky. The fact that this tendency had developed among Lenin's close friends and comrades, made his polemic against it the more biting. In conclusion, we have given extracts from Lenin's great speech to the Young Communists in 1920, on the difference between communist and religious ethics.

From the writings of Lenin the following four principles stand out as the most important:

(1) Atheism is an integral part of Marxism. Consequently a class-conscious Marxist party must carry on propaganda in favour of Atheism.

(2) The demand for the complete separation of Church and State, and Church and schools, must be made.

(3) The winning over of the proletariat is accomplished, principally by dealing with their everyday economic and political interests; consequently the propaganda in favour of Atheism must grow out of and be carefully related to, the defence of these interests.

(4) The final emancipation of the toiling masses from religion will occur only after the proletarian revolution, only in a Communist society. This, however, is not a reason for postponing the propaganda for Atheism. Rather does it emphasise its urgency in subordination to the general needs of the workers' class struggle.

Lenin's attitude towards religion can be seen most clearly in the programme of the Communist Party of Russia drawn up in March, 1919. Under the heading of "General Political Questions," section 13, we read:

> "With regard to religion, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union does not confine itself to the already-decreed separation of Church and State and of School and Church, *i.e.*, measures advocated in the programmes of bourgeois democracy, which the latter has nowhere consistently carried out to the end owing to the diverse and actual ties which bind capital with religious propaganda.
>
> "The Communist Party of the Soviet Union is guided by the conviction that only the conscious and deliberate planning of all the social and economic activities of the masses will cause religious prejudices to die out. The Party strives for the complete dissolution of the ties between the exploiting classes and the organisation of religious propaganda, facilitates the real emancipation of the working masses from religious prejudices and organises the widest possible scientific educational and anti-religious propaganda. At the same time it is necessary carefully to avoid giving such offence to the religious sentiments of believers, as only leads to the strengthening of religious fanaticism."

Similarly, the programme of the Communist International, adopted at the Sixth World Congress in 1928, states:

> "The fight against religion, the opium of the people, occupies an important position among the tasks of the cultural revolution. This fight must be carried on persistently and systematically. The proletarian power must withdraw all State support from the Church, and abolish the influence exercised by the Church on the system of education and training organised by the State; it must ruthlessly suppress the counter-revolutionary activities of ecclesiastical organisations. The proletarian power acknowledges freedom of conscience, but at the same time uses all the means at its disposal to conduct anti-religious propaganda, abolishes the privileged position of the established church and reforms the entire educational system on the basis of the scientific materialist conception of the world."*

We said at the beginning of this foreword that Marxism cannot be conceived without atheism. We would add here that atheism without Marxism is incomplete and inconsistent. The decline of the bourgeois freethinkers' movement offers an instructive confirmation of this argument. Wherever materialism in science fails to develop into historical materialism—that is, into Marxism—it ends up in idealism and superstition.

* *The Programme of the Communist International* (Modern Books, Ltd., London, 1929). In the section entitled: *The Dynamic Laws of Capitalism and the Epoch of Industrial Capital*, the programme analyses "the incapacity of the bourgeoisie, notwithstanding the enormous achievements of the natural sciences, to create a synthetically scientific philosophy, and the growth of idealist, mystical and religious superstition." . . . The introduction to the programme expressly declares: "Advocating and propagating the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels, and employing it as a revolutionary method of conceiving reality, with the view of the revolutionary transformation of this reality, the Communist International wages an active struggle against all forms of bourgeois philosophy. . . ."

I

SOCIALISM AND RELIGION

MODERN society is based entirely on the exploitation of the enormous masses of the working-class, by an insignificant minority of the population—the landowning and capitalist classes. This society is a slave society, for the "free" workers, who work all their lives for the benefit of capital, have a "right" only to so much of the means of existence as is essential to sustain them as slaves while producing profit for the capitalists—or in short sufficient to secure and perpetuate capitalist slavery.

This economic oppression of the workers gives rise inevitably to all forms of political oppression and social degradation: it renders the spiritual and moral life of the masses coarser and more sordid. The workers may acquire a greater or less degree of political freedom to fight for their economic emancipation, but so long as the domination of capital continues, no amount of freedom will rid them of destitution, unemployment and oppression.

Religion is one of the forms of spiritual oppression which everywhere weigh upon the masses who are crushed by continuous toil for others, by poverty and deprivation. The helplessness of all the exploited in their struggle against the exploiters inevitably generates a belief in a better life after death, even as the helplessness of the savage in his struggle with nature gives rise to a belief in gods, devils, miracles, etc.

Religion teaches those who toil in poverty all their lives to be resigned and patient in this world, and consoles them with the hope of reward in heaven. As for those who live upon the labour of others, religion teaches them to be "charitable"—thus providing a justification for exploitation and, as it were, also a cheap ticket to heaven likewise. "Religion is the opium of the people."* Religion is a kind of spiritual intoxicant, in which the slaves of capital

* This aphorism was employed by Marx in his criticism of Hegel's *Philosophy of Law*. After the October revolution it was engraved on the walls of the former City Hall in Moscow, right opposite to the famous Shrine of the Iberian Virgin Mother. This Shrine has now been removed.

drown their humanity, and blunt their desire for a decent human existence.

But a slave who has become conscious of his slavery, and who has risen to the height of fighting for his emancipation, has half-ceased to be a slave. The class-conscious worker of to-day, brought up in the environment of a big factory, and enlightened by town life, rejects religious prejudices with contempt. He leaves heaven to the priests and bourgeois hypocrites. He fights for a better life for himself, here on earth. The modern proletariat ranges itself on the side of Socialism, which, with the help of science, is dispersing the fog of religion and is liberating the workers from their faith in a life after death, by rallying them to the present-day struggle for a better life here upon earth.

"Religion must be regarded as a private matter"; in these words the attitude of Socialists to religion is usually expressed. But we must define the meaning of these words precisely so as to avoid misunderstanding. We demand that religion be regarded as a private matter as far as the State is concerned, but under no circumstances can we regard it as a private matter in our own party.

The State must not concern itself with religion; religious societies must not be bound to the State. Everyone must be absolutely free to profess whatever religion he likes, or to profess No religion, i.e., to be an atheist, as every Socialist usually is. There must be no discrimination whatever in the rights of citizens on religious grounds. Even particulars concerning the religion of citizens on official documents must be completely done away with.* No subsidies must be paid to the Established Church, and no grants from state funds made to church or religious societies. These must become independent of the State, voluntary associations of citizens of one faith.

Only the fulfilment of these demands can put an end to that shameful and accursed past when the Church was in feudal dependence on the State, and Russian citizens were in feudal dependence on the Established Church; when inquisitorial, mediæval laws (which are still on our statute books and in our legal codes) were actively in force. These laws laid down penalties for the profession or non-

* In Tsarist Russia, the religion one professed was included in the particulars contained in official documents, passport, marriage certificate, etc.

profession of a particular religion. They violated the conscience of the individual, and connected the distribution of official posts and revenues with the distribution of this or that state church intoxicant. Complete separation of Church and State—this must be the demand of the socialist proletariat to-day.

The Russian Revolution must enforce this demand, as a necessary instalment of political freedom. The Russian Revolution is in fact in a particularly favourable position for doing this, since the disgusting political red tape of the feudal autocracy has stirred up discontent and indignation even among the clergy. Cowed and ignorant as the orthodox Russian clergy is, it has nevertheless been sufficiently aroused by the thunder of the collapsing mediæval Russian regime to endorse the popular demand for liberty. The clergy joins in the protest against the tyranny of officialdom and rebels against the police inquisition forced on the "Servants of God."

Socialists must support this movement, and carry these demands of the honest and sincere clergy to their logical conclusion. Socialists must take them at their word when they talk about liberty, and demand that they completely sever all connection between religion and the police. We must say to them: "If you are sincere you must stand for a complete separation of the Church from the State, for a separation of the school from the church, and insist that religion be regarded entirely and unconditionally as a private matter. If you do not accept these consistent demands of liberty, it means that you are still a slave to inquisitorial traditions—it means that you are still hankering after government posts and the revenues attached to them, it means that you do not believe in the spiritual force of your weapon, and that you still wish to take bribes from the government. If this is so, the class-conscious Russian workers will declare ruthless war on you."

To the proletarian Socialist party, however, religion is not a private matter. Our Party is a league of class-conscious, progressive fighters for the liberation of the working-class. Such a league cannot and must not be indifferent to ignorance or benightedness in the shape of religious beliefs. We demand the entire separation of the State from the Church, in order to disperse the fog of religion by purely intellectual and only intellectual weapons, by our press and oral persuasion. One of the objects of our organisation, the Russian

Social-Democratic Labour Party,* is precisely to fight against all religious deception of the workers. For us, the ideological struggle is not a private matter but one that concerns the whole Party, and the whole proletariat.

If so, why do we not declare in our programme that we are atheists ? Why do we not debar Christians and believers in God from joining our Party ?

The answer to this question reveals a very important difference between the bourgeois-democratic, and the Socialist-democratic attitude towards religion.

Our programme is entirely based on scientific—to be more precise—upon *materialist* philosophy. In explaining our programme therefore we must necessarily explain the actual historical and economic roots of religion. Our programme thus necessarily includes the propaganda of atheism. Further the publication of scientific literature (which up till now has been strictly forbidden and persecuted by the autocratic feudal government) must now form one of the items of our party work. We shall now, probably, have to follow the advice which, once upon a time, Engels gave to the German Socialists—to translate and spread among the masses the enlightening atheist literature of the Eighteenth century.

But we must under no circumstances allow ourselves to be sidetracked into a treatment of the religious question in the abstract—idealistically—as a matter of " reason " quite detached from the class struggle—a presentation often given by radical bourgeois democrats. It would be absurd to imagine in a society based upon the unlimited oppression and degradation of the working masses that it is possible to dispel religious prejudices by mere preaching. It would be bourgeois narrow-mindedness to lose sight of the fact that the religious oppression of humanity is only a product or reflex aspect of the economic oppression in society. No books, no preaching, can possibly enlighten the proletariat, unless it is enlightened by its own struggle against the dark forces of capitalism. A union in that genuinely revolutionary struggle of the oppressed class to set up a heaven on earth is more important to us than a unity in proletarian opinion about the imaginary paradise in the sky.

* The original name of the party of which (after 1903) the " Bolsheviks " became the left-wing. Ultimately the division became a complete split and the " Bolsheviks " went forward to become the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R.

That is why we do not declare, and must not declare in our programme that we are "Atheists"; that is why we do not forbid and must not forbid proletarians who still cling to the remnants of old prejudices to come into closer contact with our Party. We shall always preach a scientific philosophy; we must fight against the inconsistencies of the " Christians "; but this does not mean that the religious question must be pushed into the foreground where it does not belong. We must not allow the forces waging a genuinely revolutionary economic and political struggle to be broken up for the sake of opinions and dreams that are of third-rate importance, which are rapidly losing all political significance, and which are being steadily relegated to the rubbish heap by the normal course of economic development.

The reactionary bourgeoisie, here as elsewhere, always takes pains to fan religious animosities in order to divert the attention of the masses away from those really important and fundamental questions, economic and political, which the Russian proletariat, by combining in the practice of a revolutionary struggle, is deciding. This reactionary tactic of splitting the proletarian forces, which to-day manifests itself mainly by Black-Hundred* pogroms, may to-morrow, express itself in more subtle forms. We will in any case oppose to it a calm, sustained and patient advocacy of proletarian solidarity and scientific philosophy, which will avoid rousing secondary differences.

The revolutionary proletariat will see to it that religion does really become a private matter as far as the State is concerned. And then, under a regime cleaned of mediæval mustiness, the proletariat will wage a great open struggle for the abolition of economic slavery, the real source of the religious deception of humanity.

Novaya Zhizn, No. 28, December 16th, 1905.
(*Signed*) N. LENIN.

* Members of the so-called League of the Russian People, organised by the Tzarist police and patronised by " High Society. " In the main the League consisted of hooligans and the dregs of society who were hounded by the police against revolutionaries, students, Jews and other national minorities. They perpetrated the savage " progroms " on the Jews.

II

THE ATTITUDE OF THE WORKERS' PARTY TOWARDS RELIGION

SOCIAL-DEMOCRACY builds its whole philosophy on the basis of scientific Socialism, i.e., Marxism. The philosophic basis of Marxism, as Marx and Engels repeatedly declared, is dialectic materialism. This dialectic materialism fully accepts the historical traditions of the Materialism of the eighteenth century in France, and of Feuerbach* (first half of the nineteenth century) in Germany —which is absolutely atheistic, and definitely hostile to all religion. Let us remember that the whole of Engel's *Anti-Dühring*,† which Marx read in manuscript, accuses the "materialist and atheist," Dühring, of not being a consistent materialist, and of leaving loopholes for religion and religious philosophy. Let us remember that Engels, in his essay on Ludwig Feuerbach, reproaches Feuerbach for fighting against religion not in order to destroy it, but in order to revive it, to create a new "exalted" religion, etc.

Marx said: "Religion is the opium of the people"—and this postulate is the corner stone of the whole philosophy of Marxism with regard to religion. Marxism always regarded all modern religions and churches, and every kind of religious organisation as instruments of that bourgeois reaction whose aim is to defend exploitation by stupefying the working-class.

At the same time, however, Engels repeatedly condemned those who, desiring to be "more revolutionary" than Social-Democracy, tried to introduce into the programme of the workers' party the explicit avowal of Atheism—those who strove to "declare war on religion."

In 1874, commenting on a manifesto by some fugitives of the Commune, Blanquists, then emigrants in London, Engels described their noisy proclamation of War on Religion as nonsense, and stated that such a declaration of war would be the best means of reviving interest in religion, and in preventing it from dying out. Engels

* Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) a German philosopher, who first was a follower of Hegel and later became a materialist. In his *Essence of Christianity* he sought to prove that the domination of religion over man had come to an end. Man's highest ideal he argued was inherent in himself and in life on earth. Outside of this there is no other life. In his conception of God, Man merely idealised his own being.

† In English known in a truncated version as *Landmarks of Scientific Socialism*. Charles H. Kerr & Co., New York.

condemned the Blanquists for failing to understand that only the mass working-class struggle, drawing the widest strata of the proletariat into all forms of conscious and revolutionary social *practice*, will free the oppressed masses really from the yoke of religion; while proclaiming war on religion as a political objective of the workers' party, is a mere anarchist pose. And in 1877, in *Anti-Dühring*, Engels, while ruthlessly attacking the slightest concession made by the philosopher Dühring to Idealism and religion, condemns no less resolutely Dühring's pseudo-revolutionary notion that religion would be *prohibited* in Socialist society.

To declare such war on religion, says Engels, means "being more Bismarckian than Bismarck himself," i.e., to repeat the stupidity of the Bismarckian struggle against clericalism (the famous "Struggle for Culture," Kulturkampf, i.e., the struggle Bismarck waged in 1870 against the German Catholic Party, the party of the "Centre," and the political persecution of Catholicism that it involved). By this struggle Bismarck only *strengthened* the militant clericalism of the Catholics, and injured the work of real culture, because he brought religious divisions instead of political ones to the forefront and thus diverted the attention of sections of the working-class and of the democracy from the urgent tasks of class and revolutionary struggle to those of the most superficial and mendacious-bourgeois anti-clericalism.

Engels accused the would-be ultra-revolutionary Dühring of proposing merely to repeat Bismarck's absurdity in another form. He demanded that the workers' party should work patiently at those tasks of organizing and educating the proletariat, which would lead to religion dying out, and refuse to be drawn into any adventurist political war against religion.

This point of view was thoroughly assimilated by German Social-Democracy, which advocated, for example, freedom for the Jesuits, their admission into Germany, and the cessation of the struggle against any particular religion by police methods. Religion is a "private matter"; this famous point in the Erfurt Programme (1891) confirmed these political tactics of Social-Democracy.

These tactics, however, have nowadays become a matter of mere routine. This has given rise to a new distortion of Marxism—one in the opposite direction, the direction of opportunism.

This point in the Erfurt programme has come to be interpreted as meaning that we the Social-Democrats—as a party—consider religion to be for *us* a private matter. Without undertaking a direct polemic against this opportunist point of view, Engels in 1890 deemed it necessary to oppose it resolutely, not in a polemical, but in a positive way; that is to say, Engels issued a statement in which he expressly emphasized that Social-Democrats regarded religion as a private matter *in relation to the government*, but by no means in relation to themselves, to Marxism, or to the workers' party.*

This is the history of the stand taken by Marx and Engels on the question of religion. To those who take up a superficial attitude towards Marxism, who cannot or do not want to think, this history is a mass of meaningless contradictions and waverings of Marxism; it is a jumble of "consistent" atheism and "concessions" to religion, an "unprincipled" wavering between a revolutionary struggle against God, and a cowardly desire to "ingratiate" oneself with religious workers—a fear to scare them, etc., etc. The literature of anarchist phrasemongers is replete with attacks of this kind upon Marxism.

But anyone who is at all able to take Marxism seriously, to think out its philosophical principles and the experience of international Social-Democracy, will readily see that Marxian tactics in regard to religion are thoroughly consistent and were profoundly thought out by Marx and Engels; it is obvious that what the dilettantes or ignoramuses regard as wavering is but a direct and inevitable deduction from dialectic materialism. It would be a great mistake to think that the seeming "moderation" of Marxism in relation to Religion can be explained by so-called "tactical" considerations, by the desire "not to frighten" the religious workers, etc. On the contrary, the political line of Marxism on this question is inseparably bound up with its philosophical principles.

Marxism is materialism. As such it is as relentlessly opposed to Religion as was the materialism of the Encyclopædists of the eighteenth century, or as was the materialism of Feuerbach. This is beyond doubt. But the dialectic materialism of Marx and Engels goes

* In his introduction to Marx's *Civil War in France* Engels writes: "The Commune introduced reforms which the Republican bourgeoisie failed to introduce out of cowardice, but which serve as a necessary basis for the action of the working class, for instance, the principle that in regard to the State, religion is a private matter."

beyond the Encyclopædists* and Feuerbach; it applies the materialist philosophy to the field of history, to the field of social science. We must combat religion—this is the A.B.C. of *all* materialism, and consequently of Marxism. But Marxism is not materialism which stops at the A.B.C. Marxism goes further. It says: We must be able to combat religion, and in order to do this we must explain from the materialistic point of view why faith and religion are prevalent among the masses.

The fight against religion must not be limited nor reduced to abstract-ideological preaching. This struggle must be linked up with the concrete practical class movement; its aim must be to eliminate the social roots of religion. Why does religion retain its hold among the backward strata of the urban proletariat—among wide strata of the semi-proletariat and the masses of the peasantry? Because of the ignorance of the people!—answers the progressive bourgeoisie, the radical or bourgeois materialist. Hence—"Down with religion," "Long live Atheism," "The dissemination of Atheist views is our chief task!"

The Marxist says: "No, this is not true. Such a conception expresses the superficial limitations of bourgeois culture and the narrowness of its objective. It is shallow, and explains the roots of religion, not in a materialist, but in an idealistic fashion."

In modern capitalist countries the basis of religion is primarily *social*. The roots of modern religion are deeply embedded in the social oppression of the working masses, and in their apparently complete helplessness before the blind forces of capitalism, which every day and every hour cause a thousand times more horrible suffering and torture for ordinary working folk than are caused by exceptional events such as war, earthquakes, etc. "Fear created the gods." Fear of the blind force of capital—blind because its action cannot be foreseen by the masses—a force which at every step in life threatens the worker and the small business man with "sudden," "unexpected," "accidental" destruction and ruin, bringing in their train beggary, pauperism, prostitution, and deaths from starvation —this is THE *tap-root* of modern religion which, first of all, and above all, the materialist must keep in mind, if he does not wish to remain stuck for ever in the infant school of materialism.

* The compilers of the Great French *Encyclopædia*, edited by Diderot and d'Alembert in 1751-72. This scientific work was written from the materialist point of view.

No amount of reading matter, however enlightening, will eradicate religion from those masses who are crushed by the grinding toil of capitalism and subjected to the blind destructive forces of capitalism, until these masses, themselves, learn to fight against the social facts from which religion arises in a united, disciplined, planned and conscious manner—until they learn to fight *against the rule of the capitalist in all its forms.*

Does this mean that educational books against religion are harmful or superfluous? No. Not at all. It means that the propagation of Atheism by the Social-Democracy must be *subordinated* to a more basic task—the development of the class struggle of the exploited masses against the exploiters.

Those who have not gone to the root of dialectical materialism (i.e., of the philosophy of Marx and Engels) may not be able to understand this; or, at least, not able to understand it at first. What! Subordinate ideological propaganda, the propagation of definite ideas? Subordinate the struggle against religion, the thousand-year-old enemy of culture and progress, to the class struggle, to the struggle for transient practical-economic and political aims?

This is one of the many current objections raised against Marxism which reveal a thorough misunderstanding of Marxist dialectics. The contradiction which so confuses those who raise these objections is the contradiction of life itself, i.e., it is a dialectical and not a verbal or an invented contradiction.

To draw a hard and fast line between the theoretical propagation of Atheism, between breaking down the religious beliefs of certain sections of the proletariat, and the effect, the development, the general implications of the class struggle of these sections, is to reason non-dialectically; to transform a variable, relative boundary into an absolute one. It is a forcible tearing asunder of that which is indissolubly connected in reality. For example, the proletariat of a given district in a given branch of industry can be divided, let us say, into a vanguard of fairly class-conscious Social-Democrats (who are, it stands to reason, atheists), and the rather backward mass which, still having ties with the villages and the peasantry, still believes in God, goes to church, or is even directly influenced by the priest. These constitute, let us assume, the Christian Workers' Union. Let us suppose, further, that the economic struggle in such a locality

has resulted in a strike. A Marxist must place the success of the strike movement above all else, must definitely oppose the division of the workers in this struggle into atheists and Christians, must fight resolutely against such a division.

In such circumstances the preaching of atheism is superfluous and harmful—not from the narrow-minded consideration of not frightening the backward elements, or of losing votes at elections, etc., but from the point of view of the actual progress of the class struggle, which, in the conditions of modern capitalist society, will convert Christian workers to Social-Democracy, and to atheism a hundred times more effectively than any bald atheist sermons. To preach atheism at such a time, and in such circumstances, would only be playing *into the hands* of the Church and the priests, who would desire nothing more than to have the workers participating in the strike movement divided in accordance with their religious beliefs.

The Anarchist, who preaches war against God at all costs, actually helps the priests and bourgeoisie (as in fact the anarchists always do). The Marxist must be a materialist, i.e., an enemy of religion. But he must be a *dialectical* materialist, i.e., one who fights against religion not in the abstract, not by means of abstract, purely theoretical propaganda, equally suited to all times and to all places, but concretely, on the basis of the class struggle actually proceeding —a struggle which is educating the masses better than anything else could do. The Marxist must be able to judge the concrete situation as a whole. He must always be able to determine the boundary between anarchism and opportunism (this boundary is relative, mobile and ever-changing; but it exists), not to fall either into the abstract, wordy and in fact futile "revolutionism" of the Anarchist, or into the philistinism and opportunism of the petty bourgeois, or liberal intellectual, who shirks the fight against religion, forgets his tasks, reconciles himself to a belief in God, and who is guided, not by the interests of the class struggle, but by petty, mean calculations such as: not to offend, not to repel, not to frighten; and who is governed by the wise rule: "live and let live," etc., etc.

It is from this point of view that we must decide all particular questions concerning the attitude of Social-Democrats to religion. For example, the question often arises, is a priest eligible for membership of the Social-Democratic party? Usually, this question is

answered in the affirmative without any reservation and the experience of European Social-Democratic parties is cited. But this experience was the result not only of the application of the Marxist doctrine to the workers' movement, but, of the peculiar historical circumstances in Western Europe. These conditions being absent in Russia (we will say more about these conditions later) an unqualified affirmative in this case is incorrect. We must not say once and for all, that under no circumstances can priests be allowed to join the Social-Democratic Party; but neither should we affirm categorically the opposite.

If a priest comes to co-operate with us in our work—if he conscientiously performs party work, and does not oppose the party programme—we can accept him into the ranks of Social-Democracy, for the contradictions between the spirit and principles of our programme and the religious convictions of the priest could, in these circumstances, be regarded as a matter in which he contradicts himself, as one which concerns him alone. A political party cannot examine its members to see if there are any contradictions between their philosophy and the Party programme. Of course, such a case would be a rare exception, even in Western Europe; it is hardly possible in Russia. But if, for example, a priest joined the Social-Democratic party, and made it his chief and almost exclusive business to propagate religious views, then, of course, the Party would have to expel him.

We must not only admit into the Social-Democratic Party all those workers who still retain faith in God, we must redouble our efforts to recruit them. We are absolutely opposed to the slightest affront to these workers' religious convictions. We recruit them in order to educate them in the spirit of our programme, and not in order to carry on an active struggle against religion. We allow freedom of opinion inside the Party, but within certain limits, determined by freedom of grouping.* We are not obliged to associate with those who advocate views that have been repudiated by the majority of the Party.

Another example: Is it right, under all circumstances to censure members of the Social-Democratic party for declaring that "Socialism is my religion," and for advocating views which correspond

* At that time the party permitted those holding different shades of opinion to form groups.

to such a declaration? No! This is undoubtedly a retreat from Marxism (and consequently from Socialism), but the significance of such a retreat, its specific gravity, so to say, may be different under different conditions. It is one thing if an agitator or someone addressing workers, speaks in this way in order to make himself better understood, as an introduction to his subject, in order to present his views in terminology to which the backward masses are more accustomed. It is quite another thing when a writer begins to preach "God-creating" or God-creating Socialism (in the spirit, for example, of our Lunacharsky and Co.). To pronounce censure in the first case would be mere quibbling, or even misplaced restriction of the freedom of the propagandist, on the freedom of "pedagogical" style; in the second case, censure by the party is necessary and obligatory. For the former, the statement "Socialism is my religion" is a step *from* religion to Socialism, for the latter it is a step from Socialism *to* religion.

Let us examine now the conditions which in the West gave rise to the opportunist interpretation of the thesis "religion is a private matter." Undoubtedly, this is due to the operation of those general causes which gave rise to opportunism generally, such as the sacrifice of the fundamental interests of the workers' movement for momentary advantages. The party of the proletariat demands *that the government* shall declare religion a private matter, but it does not for a moment regard the question of the fight against the opium of the people—the fight against religious superstition, etc.—as a private matter. The opportunists have so distorted the question as to make it appear that the Social-Democratic *Party* regards religion as a private matter.

Apart from the usual opportunistic distortion (which our Duma fraction entirely omitted to explain in their speeches during the debate on religion) there are the specific, historical conditions which give rise to-day, if one can so express oneself, to a considerable indifference among European Social-Democrats upon the question of religion. These conditions are of a twofold nature.

First, the fight against religion is the historical task of the revolutionary bourgeoisie, and in the West this task was, to a great extent, undertaken (or was being undertaken) by the bourgeois democracy in the epoch of *their* revolution—of their attack upon the feudalism left over from the Middle Ages. Both in France and in

Germany there is a tradition of bourgeois struggle against religion, a struggle which was *begun* long before Socialism arose (for instance, the Encyclopædists, Feuerbach). In Russia, because of the conditions of our bourgeois-democratic revolution, this task lies almost wholly on the shoulders of the working-class. Petty-bourgeois (populist)* democracy did not do too much for us in this respect (as the new Black Hundred Cadets or Cadet Black Hundreds of "Vekh" think it did), *but much too little* in comparison with what was done in Europe.

On the other hand, the traditions of the bourgeois war on religion have given rise in Europe to a specifically bourgeois distortion of this struggle by Anarchism, one which the Marxists have explained long since and which repeatedly takes a standpoint identical with that of the bourgeoisie, in spite of the "fury" with which it attacks that bourgeoisie. The anarchists and Blanquists in the Latin countries, Johan Most and Co. in Germany (incidentally Most was a pupil of Dühring), and the anarchists of the 'eighties in Austria carried revolutionary phraseology in the struggle against religion to a *ne plus ultra*. It is not surprising that the European Social-Democrats go astray, even farther than the anarchists. This is natural, and to some degree, forgivable; but we Russian Social-Democrats should not forget the specific historical conditions of the West.

Secondly, in the West *after* the national bourgeois revolutions had drawn to a close, *after* the introduction of more or less complete freedom of conscience, the question of the democratic struggle against religion had been forced into the background by the struggle which bourgeois democracy waged against Socialism to such an extent that the bourgeois governments deliberately tried to draw the attention of the masses away from Socialism by organizing a quasi-liberal "drive" against clericalism. Such was the character of the "Kulturkampf"† in Germany and of the fight of the bourgeois republicans in France against clericalism. The present day "indifference" to the fight against religion, which is so widespread among Social-Democrats in the West, was preceded by bourgeois

* In Russia "Narodniki," from the word "narod," meaning people. These were the predecessors of the Marxists in the Russian revolutionary movement. They consisted mainly of intellectuals who made it their mission to go "among the people," to educate them. They advocated petty-bourgeois, utopian socialism, which they believed could be built up on the basis of the old Russian village communes, without the necessity for Russia passing through the darkness of capitalism. Their direct successors were the Socialist Revolutionaries, who, after the October Revolution, became counter-revolutionary.

† The struggle for culture referred to on page 16.

anti-clericalism, the purpose of which was to divert the attention of the masses of the workers from Socialism.

And this is quite understandable and legitimate, because Social-Democrats had to oppose bourgeois and Bismarckian anti-clericalism, with the tactics of *subordinating* the struggle against religion to the struggle for Socialism.

Conditions in Russia are quite different. The proletariat is the leader of our bourgeois-democratic revolution. Its Party must be the ideological leader in the struggle against every vestige of mediævalism, including the old state religion, and against every attempt to revive it or to give it a different base, etc. Therefore, although Engels rebuked the German Social-Democrats rather mildly for their opportunism in substituting the *declaration* that religion is a private matter for Social-Democrats and the Social-Democratic Party—for the workers' party *demand* that the *State* shall declare religion a private matter—he would have rebuked the Russian opportunists who imitate this German distortion a *hundred times more sharply*.

Our fraction acted quite correctly when it declared from the Duma tribunal that religion is the opium of the people, and in this way they created a precedent which should serve as the basis for all speeches delivered by Russian Social-Democrats on the question of religion. Should they have gone further and developed in greater detail their atheistic arguments? We think not. This might have incurred the danger of exaggerating the fight of the proletarian political party against religion; it might have led to the obliteration of the line of demarcation separating the bourgeois from the Socialist fight against religion. The first thing the Social-Democratic fraction in the Black Hundred Duma had to do was done with honour.

The second, and perhaps the most important thing that had to be done from the Social-Democratic standpoint was to explain the class role of the Church and the clergy in supporting the Black Hundred government and the bourgeoisie in their fight against the working-class. This also was done with honour.

Thirdly, it was necessary to explain the true meaning of the postulate which the German opportunists advance, i.e., "Religion must be declared to be a private matter."

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III

THE ATTITUDE OF CLASSES AND PARTIES TOWARDS RELIGION

THE debates in the Duma* on the questions of the Budget, of the Holy Synod,† of the restoration of rights to persons leaving their ecclesiastical calling, and finally of the Old Believers'‡ congregation, provided instructive material for a characterisation of the Russian political parties according to their attitude towards religion and the Church. We will briefly examine this material, and deal mainly with the debate on the Budget of the Holy Synod. (We have not yet received the stenographic reports of the debates on the other questions mentioned.)

The first conclusion we must draw from our examination of the Duma debates is that not only does militant clericalism exist in Russia, but it is becoming obviously stronger and better organized. On April 29th, Bishop Mitrophan declared: "The first steps of our activity in the Duma were aimed at raising the highly honourable representatives of the people, in this Duma, above party fractions, and at forming a single group of priests which would discuss all questions from its own ethical point of view. . . . Why have we not achieved this? . . . The fault lies with those who sit on the same benches with you (i.e., the Cadets and 'lefts'), namely, the priest-deputies who belong to the opposition. They were the first to raise their voices and say that what we proposed was nothing but the creation of a Clerical Party and that this was most undesirable. Of course, there is no need to speak of the clericalism of the Russian orthodox clergy—such a tendency never existed among us—and in

* The Russian Parliament. As a result of the 1905 Revolution the Tzar was compelled to establish a Parliament or Duma. The first Duma, which had restricted powers was convened in 1906. Coming into conflict with the government it was dissolved. Another Duma was convened in 1907 which met with the same fate. A third Duma was convened in 1907 on a still more restricted franchise which secured an overwhelming majority for the landlords and capitalists. This Duma continued to exist until its term of office expired. The Fourth Duma which succeeded it was dispersed by the revolution of 1917.

† The Supreme Body of the Orthodox Church the members of which were appointed by the Tzar on the recommendation of the Procurator of the Holy Synod—the Minister in charge of the affairs of the Church.

‡ A religious sect that split off from the Orthodox Greek Church in the 18th Century, which clung to the old dogmas and ritual. It frequently came into conflict with the Tzarist government and it took an active part in the rebellions of Stenka Razin and Pugatchev. In latter days it was constantly persecuted by the government and the Church.

our desire to form a separate group, we pursued purely moral, ethical aims; yet now, gentlemen, when owing to the dissension which the left deputies have sown in our brotherly midst, divisions and splits have taken place, you (i.e., the Cadets*) blame us for it."

Bishop Mitrophan, in his illiterate speech, gave the secret away: the lefts are guilty of having dissuaded a section of the priests in the Duma from organizing a separate "moral" (a word much more suitable for duping the people than "clerical") group!

Almost a month later, May 26th, Bishop Eulogius read out in the Duma the "resolution passed by the Duma clergy," which declared that: "The overwhelming majority of the orthodox clergy in the Duma are of the opinion . . . that for the sake of 'preserving the primacy and predominance of the Orthodox Church' the Old Believers must not be granted the right to preach or to establish congregations at will, nor must the clergy of the Old Believers be allowed to bear the title of minister of religion. . . ." The "purely moral point of view" of the Russian priests thus revealed itself as the most unadulterated clericalism. . . .

What was the "purely moral, ethical point of view of the overwhelming majority of the Duma clergy"?—the third (June) Duma, it should be added. Here are some extracts from their speeches: "I only want to say that the initiative in these (i.e., church) reforms must emanate from within the Church and not from without; not from the state; certainly not from the Budget Commission. The Church is a divine and eternal institution. Its laws are immutable, while the ideals of political life, as we know, are subject to perpetual change" (Bishop Eulogius, April 27th). The speaker recalled "the alarming historical parallel"—the secularization of Church property under Catharine II. "Who can guarantee that the Budget Commission, which this year expresses the desire to subordinate them (Church funds) to governmental control, will not, next year, desire to include them in the state exchequer, and then to take the management of these funds completely out of the hands of the Church and put it into those of the civil or state authority?" . . . "The rules of the Church say that since Christian souls have been entrusted to the care of the bishop, all the more so must the property of the

* A contraction of the words Constitutional Democrats, the designation of the bourgeois Liberal Party in the Duma.

Church be entrusted to him. . . . To-day your spiritual mother, the Holy Orthodox Church, stands before you (the Duma deputies) not only as before the representatives of the people, but also as before her spiritual children" (ibid).

This is pure clericalism. The Church is higher than the State, as the eternal and divine is higher than the transient and the human. The Church will never forgive the State for secularizating Church property. The Church demands for itself a premier and ruling position. For it, the Duma deputies are not only—or more accurately, not so much—representatives of the people as "spiritual children."

These are not merely officials in surplices, as the Social-Democrat Surkov expressed it, but *advocates of serfdom* in surplices. The defence of the feudal privileges of the Church, the open defence of mediævalism—that is the essence of the policy of the majority of the Third Duma clergy. Bishop Eulogius is far from being an exception. Gepetsky also girds against "secularization" as an intolerable "insult" (April 27th). The priest Mashkevitch thunders against the *Octobrists'** report as an attempt "to undermine those historical and canonical foundations upon which our Church life has rested, and must rest . . . to direct the life and activity of the Russian Orthodox Church from the canonical path to a path . . . on which . . . the real princes of the Church—the bishops—must concede almost all their rights inherited from the apostles to the temporal princes. . . . This is nothing but an encroachment on others' property, an encroachment on the right of the Church and on its property . . . the reporter is leading us to the destruction of the canonical order of Church life; he wants to subordinate the Orthodox Church, with all its economic functions, to the State Duma, to a body which consists of the most divers elements of the tolerated and non-tolerable faiths in our State" (April 27th).

The Russian Narodniks and Liberals consoled themselves for a long time, or more accurately, deluded themselves with the "theory" that in Russia there is no basis for militant clericalism, for a struggle between the "princes of the Church" and the temporal power, etc. Our revolution† dispersed this illusion together with the other Narod-

* The right wing of the Liberal bourgeoisie who were content to accept the restricted reforms offered in the Tzar's manifesto of October 1905.

† i e. the Revolution of 1905-6.

nik and Liberal illusions. Clericalism existed in a concealed form while the autocracy existed intact and inviolable. The all-powerful police and bureaucracy hid from the eyes of "society" and the people the class struggle generally, and the struggle between the "serf-owners in surplices" and the "base rabble" in particular. The very first breach the revolutionary proletariat and the peasantry made in the feudal autocracy gave the secret away. As soon as the masses of the proletariat and the advanced elements of the bourgeois democracy began to use their political freedom—to use the right to organize, which they seized at the end of 1905—the reactionary classes also began to organize, independently and openly. These classes had not so organized or come out openly under complete absolutism; but not because they were weak—because they were strong!—not because they were incapable of organizing and waging a political struggle, but because they did not then see any serious need for independent class organization. They did not believe that a mass movement against the autocracy and the adherents of feudalism was possible in Russia. They trusted wholly to the whip and its efficacy for restraining the rabble. The first wounds inflicted on the autocracy forced the social elements which supported the autocracy, and needed it, to come out into the open. The old whip was no longer effective against the masses who were able to call forth the events of January 9th—who organized the strike movement of 1905, and the October-December revolution. They had to resort to independent political action. The Council of the United Nobility had to organize the Black Hundreds and resort to the most reckless demagogy. The "princes of the Church"—the bishops—had to organize the reactionary clergy into an independent force.

The characteristic feature of the Third Duma and the Third-Duma period of the Russian counter-revolution is precisely the fact that this organization of reactionary forces, which came to the surface and began to develop on a national scale, needed imperatively a special Black-Hundred-bourgeois "parliament." Militant clericalism revealed itself, and Russian Social-Democracy will now have occasion to witness and to take part in conflicts between bourgeois clericals and bourgeois anti-clericals. Our general task is to help the proletariat to organize itself into a separate class, able to separate

itself from bourgeois democracy; but part of this task is to utilize all the means of propaganda and agitation, including the tribune of the Duma, to explain to the masses the difference between Socialist anti-Clericalism and bourgeois anti-Clericalism.

The Octobrists and Cadets, who in the Third Duma attacked the Extreme Rights, the Clericals and the Government, facilitated our task enormously by revealing the attitude of the bourgeoisie towards the Church and religion. The legal press of the Cadets and of the so-called progressives is laying great stress on the question of the Old Believers, and is making a great deal of the fact that the Cadets spoke out against the Government, and that they have even, though slightly, "taken the path of the reforms," promised on October 30th. We, however, are far more interested in the principle underlying the question, i.e., the attitude of the bourgeoisie generally—including the Cadets, who claim to be democrats—towards religion and the Church. We must not permit the relatively minor question—namely the conflict between the Old Believers and the dominant Church, and the conduct of the Octobrists who are bound to, and are even financially dependent upon, the Old Believers to some extent (for example, it is said that "Golos Moskvi"* is financed by the Old Believers)—to eclipse the fundamental question of the interests and the policy of the bourgeoisie as a class.

Read the speech of Count Uvarov, who has Octobrist leanings, but who resigned from the Octobrist fraction. He spoke after the Social-Democrat Sukov, but he evaded the fundamental principles of the question raised by the workers' deputy. Uvarov merely attacked the Synod and the Procurator of the Holy Synod for their and his reluctance to give the Duma information on certain Church revenues and the expenditure of congregation funds. The official representative of the Octobrists, Kamensky, followed the same line; he demanded (April 29th) the restoration of the congregation, "in order to strengthen the Greek Church." Kapustin, the so-called "left Octobrist," developed the same line of thought. "If we turn to the life of the people," he exclaims, "to the life of the agricultural population, we will see a sad state of affairs—religious life is crumbling, the greatest, the only foundation of the moral order of the population is crumbling. . . . What are we to substitute for the promptings of

* The Voice of Moscow, the daily organ of the Octobrists.

conscience? Surely, we cannot substitute the conception of the class struggle or the rights of one class or another? These are sad concepts which have now penetrated our social life. Hence in order that religion may continue to be the basis of morality, and that it may be accessible to the whole population, it is necessary that the guides of this religion should enjoy adequate authority. . . ."

The representative of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie wishes to strengthen religion—wishes to strengthen the influence of religion on the masses. He realizes the inadequacy, and the obsolescence of the "officials in surplices" and even the harm they do to the ruling classes by *weakening* the authority of the Church. The Octobrist fights against the exaggerations of Clericalism and police surveillance in order to *increase* the influence of religion on the masses; to substitute more subtle and more elaborate methods of stupefying the people in place of methods which are too gross, too antiquated, and too played-out, to serve their purpose. Police religion is no longer adequate for stupefying the masses. Give us a religion that is brighter, more cultured, more up-to-date; one that will do its work through self-governing parish congregations—that is what the capitalists demand from autocracy.

And Cadet Karulov shares this same point of view *completely*. This "Liberal" renegade (who evolved from the *Narodnaya Volya* to the Right Cadets) denounces the "denationalization" of the Church, meaning by this, that the masses, the laymen, are prevented from taking part in Church life. He thinks it "*shocking*" (that is what he said) that the masses are "losing their faith." After the manner of the Mensheviks he bewails the fact that the "tremendous value inherent in the Church . . . is being destroyed . . . that tremendous harm is being done, not only to the Church, but also to the State." He describes the disgustingly hypocritical assertion of the fanatic Eulogius—that "the task of the Church is eternal, immutable . . . and that means that it is impossible to combine the Church and politics"—as "golden words." He protested against the union of the Church with the Black Hundreds *in order* that the Church may "with greater power and glory than to-day, perform its great and holy work, in the spirit of Christ—of love and liberty."

Comrade Belousob did very well to ridicule these "lyrical" words

of Karaulov from the Duma tribune. But derision was not enough by a long way. It should have been explained—and this must be done from the Duma tribune at the first opportunity—that the Cadet point of view is completely identical with that of the Octobrists and expresses nothing more than the tendency of "cultured" capital to organize the stupefying of the people with religious narcotics in more subtle styles of Church deception than those which the ordinary conservative Russian "batushka"* has hitherto employed.

In order to keep the people in spiritual slavery, the closest bond must be maintained between the Church and the Black Hundreds—say the Die-hard landowners and the old bullying police officials, through the mouth of Purishkevitch. You are mistaken, gentlemen, retort the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie, through the mouth of Karaulov: you will drive the people away from religion altogether by such means. Let us act more cleverly, more cunningly and with more subtlety. Let us clear the gross and stupid Black-Hundreds out of the way, let us proclaim war on the "denationalization of the Church," let us inscribe on our banner the "golden words" of Bishop Eulogius that the Church is "above politics." Only in this way will we be able to dupe at least part of the backward workers and, in particular, the petty bourgeoisie and the peasants. Only in this way will we be able to help the regenerated Church to fulfil its "great, holy work" of retaining the masses of the people in spiritual slavery.

Our Liberal press, including the newspaper *Retch*,† has lately been taking Struve and Co. to task for publishing the compendium *Vekh*.‡ But Karaulov, the official speaker of the Constitutional Democratic Party in the Duma, exposed excellently the despicable hypocrisy of this denunciation and repudiation of Struve and Co. Struve says what Karaulov and Milyukov think. The Liberals blame Struve *only* for having blurted out the truth, only because he showed his cards too plainly. The Liberals, who censure *Vekh* and continue to support the Constitutional Democratic Party, deceive the people in the most shameless way by condemning the incautiously frank *words* while continuing *to do exactly* what these words imply.

* "Little father," priest. † "Speech" The organ of the Constitutional Democratic Party.
‡ "Guide Post" a liberal bourgeois compendium of articles published in 1909 reflecting reactionary mystical views that were prevalent among the intellectuals in the period of reaction.

Little need be said regarding the conduct of the Trudoviki* in the Duma during the debates on this question. As always, there was a marked difference between the attitude of the Trudovik-peasant and Trudovik-intellectual to the disadvantage of the latter, who is always ready to follow the lead of the Constitutional Democrats. Peasant Rozhkov, in his speech, it is true, exposed his complete lack of political class consciousness; he merely repeated the platitudes of the Cadets, that the League of the Russian People† helps, not to strengthen, but to destroy faith; but he could not suggest any programme. On the other hand, when he artlessly began to tell the naked, unvarnished truth about the exactions of the clergy, the extortions of the priests—about how, in addition to their fee for conducting the marriage ceremony, they demand "a bottle of Vodka, sandwiches, a pound of tea, *and sometimes that which I dare not speak of from this tribune*" (April 29th, p. 2,259 of the stenographic report)—*this* roused the Black Hundred Duma to a passion! A savage cry rose from the Right benches: "Shame!" "Disgraceful!" The Black Hundreds howled, realizing that the plain peasant tale of the exactions of the priests and of the "rates" charged for ceremonies, would revolutionize the masses more than any theoretical, or tactical, anti-religious or anti-Church declarations. And the gang of die-hards, defending autocracy in the Third Duma, frightened their lackey-chairman Meyendorf into ordering Rozhkov to leave the tribune. (The Social-Democrats, aided by several Trudoviks, Constitutional-Democrats, and others, protested against this.)

Although it was very elementary, the speech of Trudovik-peasant Rozhkov revealed perfectly the wide gulf separating the hypocritical, calculated-reactionary defence of religion by the Cadets and the primitive, ignorant use-and-wont religiousness of the peasant, whose living conditions roused within him—involuntarily, and in spite of himself—a truly revolutionary anger against the exactions of the priests and a readiness to fight determinedly against mediævalism. The Cadets are the representatives of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie who wish to restore and strengthen religion against the people. The Rozhkovs are the representatives of the revolutionary

* Labourists, representatives of the peasants.
† The official title of the organisation of the Black Hundreds.

bourgeois democracy—undeveloped, ignorant, downtrodden, dependent on others, scattered, but containing within itself far-from-exhausted reserves of revolutionary potentiality for the struggle against the landowners, the priests and the autocracy.

The intellectual-Trudovik Rozanov drew closer to the Cadets much less unconsciously than Rozhkov did. Rozanov talked about the separation of the Church from the State as the demand of the "lefts," but he could not refrain from uttering reactionary petty-bourgeois phrases about modifying the electoral law in such a way as to prevent the clergy from participating in the political struggle. The revolutionary temper which spontaneously bursts forth, when the typical, middle peasant begins to tell the truth about his living conditions, is totally absent when the intellectual-Trudovik speaks; instead, we hear diffuse and sometimes despicable phrases. The truism, that only when the Russian peasant masses follow the lead of the proletariat will they be able to overthrow the feudal landowners, the serf-owners in surplices, and the feudal monarchists who oppress and crush them, is confirmed for the hundredth and thousandth time.

The representative of the workers' party and the working-class, the Social-Democrat Surkov was the only one in the Duma who raised the discussion to the level of a discussion of principles, and stated without equivocation what the attitude of the proletariat is, and what the attitude of all consistent and vivid democrats should be towards the Church and religion. "Religion is the opiate of the people." . . . "Not a single groat of the people's money . . . to these mortal enemies of the people who stultify the minds of the people"—this straightforward, courageous, open war-cry of the Socialist rang out like a challenge in the Black Hundred Duma, and was taken up by millions of the proletariat who will disseminate it among the masses and who, when the time comes, will transmute it into revolutionary action.

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IV

ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MILITANT MATERIALISM

. . . THIS statement* declares that not all those who have gathered round the magazine *Under the Banner of Marxism* are Communists, but that all are consistent materialists. I think that this union of Communists and non-Communists is absolutely necessary and correctly defines the tasks of the magazine. One of the most serious and dangerous mistakes Communists (and revolutionaries generally, who have successfully carried out the beginnings of a great revolution) can make is to imagine that a revolution can be accomplished by the hands of revolutionaries alone. On the contrary, in order that serious revolutionary work may be successful, it is necessary to understand and be guided by the fact that revolutionaries can only play the role of the vanguard of the really advanced and progressive class. The vanguard fulfils its tasks as such only when it is able to keep in touch with the masses it leads, and actually lead the whole mass forward. Without a union with non-Communists, in the most varied fields of activity, successful Communist constructive effort is out of the question.

This is also true of the work in defence of materialism and Marxism which the magazine *Under the Banner of Marxism* has undertaken. The main currents of advanced social thought in Russia have, fortunately, a sound materialist tradition. Apart from G. V. Plekhanov, it is enough to mention Chernishevsky, from whom the modern Narodniks (People's Socialists, Socialist-revolutionaries, etc.) frequently retreated in their pursuit of fashionable, reactionary philosophical doctrines, yielding to the glamour of the so-called "last word" in European science and unable to see the various types of bourgeois servility, prejudice, and reaction beneath this glamour.

In any case, in Russia there are still, and no doubt there will be for a long time to come, materialists in the non-Communist camp, and it is our imperative duty to enlist the co-operation of all the adherents of consistent and militant materialism in the struggle

* The statement of principles of the Editorial Board of the magazine *Under the Banner of Marxism*, with which this article deals.—*Ed.*

against philosophical reaction and the philosophical prejudices of the so-called " cultured classes." Dietzgen senior, who must not be confused with his equally pretentious but far more inept son, correctly, neatly, and clearly, expressed the fundamental point of view of Marxism on the philosophic currents which hold sway in bourgeois countries, and gain the attention of their philosophers and publicists, when he said that in modern society a professor of philosophy, in most cases, is nothing but the " diploma-ed lackey of clericalism."

Our Russian intelligentzia, who, like their brethren in all backward countries, consider themselves to be advanced, do not like to carry this question to the plane indicated by the words of Dietzgen. And they do not like to do this because they hate the truth. It is sufficient to reflect, if only for a moment, on the manner on which modern cultured people are politically, economically and socially dependent upon the ruling bourgeoisie, to understand that Dietzgen's biting characterization is absolutely correct. It is enough to recall the great majority of fashionable philosophical trends which crop up so frequently in European countries—from those, say, which arose in connection with the discovery of radium, to those which now strive to attach themselves to Einstein—in order to see the connection between the class interests and the class position of the bourgeoisie, the support it gives to every form of religion, and the ideological content of fashionable philosophical trends.

From what has been indicated it will be clear that a magazine which desires to be an organ of militant materialism must be an aggressive organ, first, in the sense that it will persistently expose and attack all modern " diploma-ed lackeys of clericalism," irrespective of whether they speak as representatives of the official sciences, or as free-lances, calling themselves " democratic lefts or ideological-Socialist " publicists.

Secondly, such a magazine must be an organ of militant atheism. We have departments or at least government institutions which carry on this work. But this work is being carried on very sluggishly, very unsatisfactorily ; apparently it is restricted by our real Russian (also Soviet Russian) bureaucracy. It is very essential, therefore, that, in supplementing the work of the competent government institutions, in correcting and stimulating this work, the magazine which has set itself the aim of becoming an organ of militant materialism should carry on untiring atheist propaganda and struggle. We must very carefully study all the literature on this subject in all languages, and translate, or at least review all that which has the slightest value in this field.

Engels long ago advised the leaders of the modern proletariat to translate the militant Atheist literature of the end of the eighteenth century for mass distribution among the people. To our shame, we have not yet done this (one of the many proofs that it is much easier to win power in a revolutionary epoch than to use it correctly). Sometimes our sluggishness, indolence, and inability in this sphere is excused by all kinds of " bombastic " arguments, as for example, that the old atheist literature of the eighteenth century is obsolete, unscientific, naïve, etc. There is nothing worse in the world than these pseudo-scientific sophisms, for they serve to conceal either pedantry, or a complete lack of understanding of Marxism. Certainly there is much that is unscientific and naïve in the Atheist works of these revolutionary atheists of the eighteenth century. But nobody prevents the publishers of such journals from abbreviating them and supplying them with brief notes, indicating the progress made in the scientific criticism of religion since the end of the eighteenth century, giving references to writings of more recent date, etc. A Marxist could not make a worse mistake than to think that the many millions of people (particularly peasants and artisans) who are condemned by modern society to ignorance, illiteracy and prejudices can extricate themselves from this ignorance only by following the straight line of purely Marxist education. It is essential to give these masses the greatest variety of atheist propaganda material—to acquaint them with facts from the most diversified fields of life. Every way of approach to them must be tried in order to interest them, to rouse them from their religious slumber, to shake them up by most varied ways and means.

The lively, talented writings of the old atheists of the eighteenth century, which attacked skilfully and openly the clericalism prevailing in their day, will prove very often to be a thousand times more suitable for arousing the people from their religious slumber than the dull, dry, paraphrasing of Marxism, hardly ever illustrated by well selected facts, with which our literature abounds and which (to be frank) frequently distorts Marxism. All the works of Marx and Engels

of any importance have been translated here. The fear that the old Atheism and the old materialism will remain unsupplemented by the changes which Marx and Engels have introduced, is absolutely unfounded. The most important thing—forgotten most frequently by our alleged Marxian Communists—who really distort Marxism—is to be able to rouse the as yet undeveloped masses into taking an intelligent interest in the religious question and in the criticism of religion.

On the other hand, glance at the representatives of modern scientific criticism of religion. These representatives of the cultured bourgeoisie nearly always " supplement " their own refutation of religious prejudices with arguments which immediately reveal them as the ideological slaves of the bourgeoisie and as " diploma-ed lackeys of clericalism."

Two examples. Professor R. J. Wipper published a booklet in 1918: *The Rise of Christianity* (published by " Faros," Moscow). Summarizing the main achievements of modern science, the author not only refrains from combating the prejudices and deceits which are the weapons of the Church as a political organization—he not only evades these questions, but puts forward the positively ridiculous and reactionary claim to have risen above the " extremes " of the idealist and the materialist alike. This is servility to the reigning bourgeoisie which all over the world spends hundreds of millions of roubles, out of the profits it has wrung from the workers, in support of religion.

The well-known German scholar, Arthur Drews, refuting religious prejudices and fables in his book, *The Christ Myth*, proves that there was no historical Jesus; but at the end of his book he puts in a plea for religion! Not for the old religion, but for a regenerated, purged religion, one that will be able to withstand the " naturalist stream which is growing stronger every day " (p. 238, fourth German edition, 1910). This is a straightforward conscious reactionary, who is openly helping the exploiters to substitute new, viler and more despicable religious prejudices for old and rotten ones.

This does not mean that Drews' book should not have been translated. It does not mean that Communists and all consistent materialists must, while uniting to a certain extent with the progressive section of the bourgeoisie, persistently expose it when it becomes

reactionary. It means that to refrain or hold aloof from joining with the modern representatives of the bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century, i.e., of the epoch when it was revolutionary, is a betrayal of Marxism and materialism because a " union " with Drews, in one form or another, to one degree or another, is essential for us in the struggle against the prevailing religious obscurantism.

Under the Banner of Marxism, which wishes to be an organ of militant Materialism, must devote much space to Atheist propaganda, to reviews of the literature on this subject; and must make good the tremendous deficiencies in the work of our government in this field. It is particularly important to use those books and pamphlets which contain numbers of concrete facts and comparisons, which illustrate the unity between the class interests and class organizations of the modern bourgeoisie and the existing religious bodies and institutions and organizations for religious propaganda.

All the material relating to the United States of America is extremely important; although it reveals least of all the official, governmental ties between religion and capital. Nevertheless, it will enable us to see more clearly that the so-called " modern democracy " (before which the Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, and a section of the anarchists, etc., make profound obeisance) represents nothing more than freedom to preach what is advantageous for the bourgeoisie. And for the bourgeoisie it is advantageous that the most reactionary ideas should be preached—religion, obscurantism, defence of the exploiters, and so forth.

We trust that the magazine which desires to be the organ of militant Materialism will give our reading public reviews of atheist literature and will indicate to which circles of readers and in what relation particular books are generally suitable. We hope also that it will indicate what has been published (only tolerably good translations should be indicated, and there are not so many of them) and what has yet to be published.

Besides unity with consistent materialists who do not belong to the Communist Party there stands before Militant Materialism the great task—one not of less importance, but perhaps even of most importance—of uniting with those representatives of modern natural science who incline toward materialism and who are not afraid to defend it and preach it in opposition to the fashionable, philosophical

wobblings towards idealism and scepticism which now prevail in so-called " educated society."

In Number 1-2 of *Under the Banner of Marxism*, A. Timiryasev's article on Einstein's theory of Relativity permits us to hope that the journal will also succeed in bringing about this second unity. More attention must be paid to this. It must be borne in mind that the sharp change which modern natural science is at present undergoing gives rise to reactionary philosophical schools and trends. It is extremely important therefore to study the questions which the latest revolution in the field of natural science has brought to the front, and to invite natural scientists to do this work in this philosophical magazine. Unless this is done militant Materialism will be neither militant nor materialist. In the first number of *Under the Banner of Marxism*, Timiryasev pointed out that the overwhelming mass of representatives of the bourgeois intelligentzia in all countries has fastened upon Einstein's theory, although (according to Timiryasev) Einstein himself does not actively oppose the principles of materialism. This applies not only to Einstein, but to a large number, if not the majority of the great reformers of natural science, beginning with the end of the nineteenth century.

But in order to avoid reacting to such a phenomenon unintelligently, we must understand that no natural science, no materialism whatever, can hold out in the struggle against the onslaught of bourgeois ideas and the restoration of bourgeois philosophy without a solid philosophical basis. In order to give aid to this struggle and help to carry it to its successful conclusion, the natural scientist must be a *modern* Materialist—a conscious adherent of that Materialism which Marx represents ; that is, he must be a *dialectical* Materialist. To achieve this the staff of *Under the Banner of Marxism* must organize a systematic study of Hegelian dialectics from the Materialist point of view, i.e., the dialectics which Marx applied concretely in his *Capital*, and used in his historical and political works with such success that to-day the awakening of new classes to life and battle in the East (Japan, India, China)—i.e., those hundreds of millions of humanity who comprise the greater part of the population of the world, and who, until now, have, by their historical inactivity and historical slumber, caused stagnation and decay in many of the foremost states of Europe—this awakening of new peoples and new

classes to life confirms the correctness of Marxism daily and more and more.

Certainly, such a study, interpretation and propaganda of Hegel's dialectics is extraordinarily difficult ; and, no doubt, mistakes will be made in the early stages. But only those who do nothing make no mistakes. Basing ourselves on the manner in which Marx applied the materialist conception of Hegelian dialectics, we can and must work out these dialectics from all sides. The magazine must publish excerpts from the principal works of Hegel ; must interpret them materialistically, and give examples of how Marx applied dialectics, as well as examples of dialectics from the field of economic and political relations. Modern history, particularly modern imperialist war and revolution, provide innumerable examples of this kind. The editors and staff of *Under the Banner of Marxism* should, I think, represent a sort of " Association of Materialist Friends of Hegelian Philosophy." Modern natural scientists will find (if they will seek, and if we can learn to help them) in the materialist interpretation of Hegelian dialectics a number of answers to those philosophical questions which the revolution in natural science has brought to the front and which cause the intellectual admirers of bourgeois fashions to " slip " into the reactionary camp.

Unless we set ourselves this task and carry it out systematically, materialism will never be militant Materialism. It will remain (to use an expression of Schedrin's) not a fighter, but one who is fought. Unless we do this, the great investigators in natural science will be as helpless in their philosophical deductions and generalizations as they have been heretofore. For natural science is progressing so rapidly, is passing through a period of such profound revolutionary change in all fields, that we cannot possibly dispense with philosophical deductions. . . .

V

WHAT IS RELIGION GOOD FOR?

THE reader will probably remember the sensation that was caused by the lecture delivered by M. A. Stakhovich, the marshal of the nobility of the province of Oryol, at a missionary congress, in the course of which he urged that *liberty of conscience* should be recognized by law. The conservative press, led by *Moskovskiye Vyedomosti*, is conducting a furious campaign against Mr. Stakhovich. It cannot find names bad enough to call him; and almost goes so far as to charge the whole nobility of Oryol with high treason for having re-elected Mr. Stakhovich as their marshal. Now, this re-election is indeed very significant, and to a certain extent attains the character of a demonstration of the nobility against police tyranny and outrage.

"Stakhovich," says *Moskovskiye Vyedomosti*, "is known not so much as marshal of the nobility, but as jolly Misha Stakhovich, the soul of good company, who possesses the gift of the gab. . . ." (1901, No. 348).* The worse for you, gentlemen, you champions of the big stick. If even your jolly landlords begin to talk about liberty of conscience then the despicable conduct of the priests and the police must indeed have exceeded all bounds. . . . "What concern has the 'intellectual,' frivolous crowd that instigates and applauds the Stakhoviches, for the interests of our holy orthodox faith, and our time-honoured attitude towards it?" . . . Once again: All the worse for you, gentlemen, champions of the autocracy, of the orthodox faith and of nationalism. A fine system our police-ridden autocracy must be, indeed, if it has permeated even religion with the spirit of the jail and to such an extent that the "Stakhoviches" (who have no stable religious convictions, but who are interested, as we shall see, in preserving religion) become completely indifferent towards (if they do not actually hate) this notorious "national faith"! . . . "Thanks to this 'delusion,' we fear and avoid sin, and carry out our obligations uncomplainingly, no matter how severe they may be, because we find the strength and courage to

* The passages quoted are from an article entitled, "Who is Responsible for Mr. Stakhovich?", signed by A.P.G. and published in *Moskovskiye Vyedomosti*, December 18, 1901.

bear sorrow and privations, and forgo pride in times of success and good fortune. . . ." So this is what it is, is it? The orthodox faith is dear to them because it teaches them to bear misfortune so "uncomplainingly"! What a profitable faith it is, indeed—for the governing classes! In a society so organized that an insignificant minority enjoys wealth and power, while the masses constantly suffer "deprivation" and bear "severe obligations," it is quite natural for the exploiters to sympathize with a religion that teaches us to bear "uncomplainingly" the woes of hell on earth, in the hope of an alleged paradise in the skies. But in its zeal *Moskovskiye Vyedomosti* becomes too garrulous. So garrulous in fact that *unwittingly it spoke the truth!* Listen further: ". . . . They do not realize that thanks to this 'delusion' they, the Stakhoviches, eat well, sleep peacefully, and live merrily."

This is the sacred truth! Thus, in fact, it is. It is thanks to this wide spread of religious "delusions" among the masses of the people, that the Stakhoviches and the Oblomovs,* are able to sleep peacefully and all our capitalists who live by the labour of these masses likewise. And likewise also the *Moskovskiye Vyedomosti* itself. The more religious prejudices give place to Socialist consciousness, the nearer will be the day of victory of the proletariat—the victory that will emancipate all the oppressed classes from the slavery they endure in modern society. . . .

Iskra, No. 16, February 14th, 1902.

* The indolent hero of Goncharov's novel of the same name.

VI

LEO TOLSTOY AS A MIRROR OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

To identify the name of this great writer with the revolution which he obviously did not understand, and from which he obviously stood apart, may seem, at first glance, strange and artificial. Surely a thing that obviously does not reflect phenomena accurately cannot be called a mirror? But our revolution is an extraordinarily complex phenomenon. Among the mass of its direct agents and participants there are many social elements which have also failed obviously to understand what was taking place, and have also abandoned the historical tasks which the course of events set before them. And a really great writer could not help reflecting at least some of the essential aspects of the revolution.

The legal Russian press, crammed with articles, letters and notes on Tolstoy's eightieth anniversary, is interested least of all in an analysis of his works from the point of view of the character of the Russian revolution and its driving forces. The whole of this press is chock full of sickening hypocrisy—hypocrisy of a twofold nature: "official," and "liberal." The first is the vulgar hypocrisy of the venal scribe who bidden yesterday to attack Tolstoy is to-day bidden to discover patriotism in him, and to observe towards him in the eyes of Europe all the rules of propriety. Everybody knows what these scribes have been paid, and they cannot deceive anyone. But the liberal hypocrisy is much more subtle, and therefore much more harmful and dangerous. To listen to the Cadet Balaleikins of the *Rech* one would imagine that their sympathy for Tolstoy was most ardent and complete. Actually, their calculated declamations and bombastic phrases about the "great God-seeker" are just sheer hypocrisy because the Russian liberal neither believes in the Tolstoyan God, nor sympathizes with the Tolstoyan criticism of the existing order. He associates himself with a popular name in order to increase his political capital—to play the role of leader of the national opposition. He tries by means of crashing and thundering phrases to drown the cry for a direct and clear answer to the question: what causes the glaring contradictions of "Tolstoyanism"?—what deficiencies and weaknesses of our revolution do they reflect?

The contradictions in the works, views and teachings of the Tolstoyan school are really glaring contradictions.

On the one hand we have the gifted writer who is not only able to draw an incomparable picture of Russian life, but is able to produce first-class world literature. On the other hand we have the landowner wearing the martyr's crown in the name of Christ.

On the one hand—a remarkably strong, direct and sincere protest against social lies and hypocrisies. On the other hand—the "Tolstoyan," i.e., the exhausted hysterical, misery-mongering Russian intellectual, who, publicly beating his breast, cries: "I am bad, I am vile, but I am striving for moral self-perfection; I no longer eat meat but live on rice cutlets!"

On the one hand, ruthless criticism of capitalist exploitation; exposure of government violence, of the comedy of justice, and state administration; revelation of the depths of the contradictions between the growth of wealth and of the acquirements of civilization and the growth of poverty, of the brutalizing and torturing of the working masses. On the other hand—the fanatical preaching of "non-resistance to evil."

On the one hand, the soberest realism, and the rending away of all and every kind of mask. On the other hand, the advocacy of one of the most corrupt things existing in the world, religion—the attempt to replace the official state priests by priests of moral conviction, i.e., the cultivation of the most subtle, and therefore the most especially loathsome kind of clericalism. In truth:

> "You are poor; you are abundant;
> You are powerful; you are helpless;
> Mother Russia!"*

In face of these contradictions, it is quite obvious that Tolstoy could not understand either the workers' movement and its role in the struggle for Socialism, or the Russian revolution. But these contradictions in the views and teachings of Tolstoy are not accidental. They are expressions of the contradictions in Russian life during the last third of the nineteenth century. The patriarchal village, only yesterday freed from serfdom, was literally handed over to the violence and plunder of capital and the State. The old basis of

* From Nekrassov's poem: "Who Lives Well in Russia."

peasant economy and peasant life, a basis which had really maintained itself for centuries, broke down with unusual rapidity. And the contradictions in Tolstoy's views must be evaluated not from the point of view of the modern labour movement and modern Socialism (such an evaluation, naturally, is essential, but it is not enough), but from the point of view of the protest which arose from the patriarchal Russian village against the onslaught of capitalism, against the ruin of the masses and their expropriation from the land. Tolstoy as a prophet discovering new recipes for the salvation of humanity is merely amusing—and therefore those Russian and foreign "Tolstoyans" who seek to transform this the very weakest side of his teaching into a dogma are thoroughly contemptible.

Tolstoy is great as the expression of those ideas and moods which arose among the millions of the Russian peasantry with the advance of the bourgeois revolution in Russia. Tolstoy is original because his views, harmful as a whole, express in their totality precisely the distinguishing characteristic of our revolution, viz., a *peasant*-bourgeois revolution. Thus understood, the contradictions in Tolstoy's views are a reflex of the contradictory historical conditions within which the activities of the peasantry in our revolution were constrained. On the one hand, centuries of feudal oppression and decades of accelerating post-reform ruination* heaped up mountains of hate, anger, and desperate resolve. The effort to sweep away the State Church, the landowners and the landowning government—to destroy all the old forms and systems of land ownership—to purge the land—to create in the place of the police-class government a community of free and equal small-peasants—runs like a thread through every historical step the peasantry have taken in our revolution; and, undoubtedly, the ideological content of Tolstoy's writings corresponds much more to this struggle of the peasantry than to the abstract "Christian anarchism," sought to be deduced as a "system" from his conceptual outlook.

On the other hand, the peasantry, striving towards a new form of social life, had an extremely vague, patriarchal-religious conception of the type of social life they desired, of the type of struggle required to win their freedom, of the type of leaders required in this struggle, of the attitude the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois intelli-

* I.e., the emancipation of the serfs, which really led to the ruin of the peasantry.—*Ed.*

gentzia would take towards the interests of this peasant revolution, and why a violent overthrow of the Tsar's power was an indispensable preliminary to the expropriation of the big landlords. The whole past life of the peasantry had taught them to hate the landlords and the government officials, but it did not, and could not, teach them where to go for an answer to all these questions. In our revolution, only a minority of the peasantry actually fought and organized for revolution to any appreciable extent; and only a very small minority took up arms to destroy their enemies—to destroy the Tsarist lackeys and the defenders of the landowners. The majority of the peasantry wept and prayed, moralized and dreamed, wrote petitions and sent "petitioners" quite in the spirit of Leo Nikolayevitch Tolstoy! And as always happens in such cases, the Tolstoyan abstention from politics, the Tolstoyan abjuration of politics, indifference to politics, misunderstanding of politics, resulted in a minority, only, siding with the conscious and revolutionary proletariat, while the majority fell a prey to the unprincipled, menial, bourgeois intellectuals, who, under the name of Cadets, ran from the meetings of the Trudoviks, were reconciled, and promised to reconcile, until they were finally driven out with a kick of the soldier's jackboot. Tolstoyan ideas are a mirror of the weaknesses and the deficiencies of our peasant uprising, a reflection of the flabbiness of the patriarchal village and the ingrained cowardice of the "thrifty moujik."

Let us take the mutineers in the army of 1905-1906. These fighters in our revolution represented socially an intermediary between the peasantry and the proletariat. The latter being in the minority, the movement in the army never attained anything near to the degree of solidarity shown in Russia as a whole, or anything like such party class-consciousness as the proletariat revealed when they became Social-Democrats as if at a wave of the hand. On the other hand, nothing can be more mistaken than the opinion that the failure of the mutinies was due to the fact that the officers did not lead them. On the contrary, the gigantic progress the revolution has made since the time of the *Narodnaya Volya* is shown precisely in the fact that the "ignorant cattle" whose independence so frightened the Liberal landowners and Liberal officers, took up arms *against* their officers. The soldier was full of sympathy for the peasant's cause; his eyes flashed at the mention of land. More than

once in the army the initiative was in the hands of the soldier masses—but in practice no resolute use was made of this power. The soldiers wavered. After several days—sometimes after several hours—having killed one hated commander, they released the others, negotiated with the authorities, and quietly went to execution, or bending their bodies beneath the lash, harnessed themselves once again to the yoke, completely in the spirit of Leo Nikolayevitch Tolstoy!

Tolstoy reflected the accumulated hate, the ripened aspiration for a better life, the desire to throw off the past—and also the immaturity, the dreamy contemplativeness, the political inexperience, and the revolutionary flabbiness of the villages. Historico-economic conditions explain the inevitability of the rise of the revolutionary struggle of the masses. They also explain the unpreparedness of the masses for struggle; and also that Tolstoyan non-resistance to evil, which was the most serious cause of the defeat of the first revolutionary campaigns.

It is said that beaten armies learn well. Certainly a comparison between a revolutionary class and an army can be made only to a very limited extent. The breakdown of capitalism changes hourly and sharpens hourly the conditions which drove the peasant millions, united by hatred of the feudal landowners and their government, into a revolutionary-democratic struggle. Among the peasantry itself the growth of exchange, the domination of the market and the power of money, displace increasingly antiquated patriarchalism and its accompanying philosophical* ideology. But the first years of the revolution and the first defeats in the mass revolutionary struggle undoubtedly achieved one thing. They delivered the death-blow to the one-time softness and flabbiness of the masses. The lines of demarcation have grown sharper. Boundaries have been fixed for classes and parties. Under the educating hammer of Stolypin will be developed inevitably, through the undeviating and consistent agitation of the revolutionary Social-Democrats, not only from the Socialist proletariat, but also from amongst the democratic masses of the peasantry, more and more hardened fighters who will be less and less likely to fall into our historical sin of Tolstoyanism.

Proletarii, No. 35, 11th (24) Sept., 1908.

* In MSS., Tolstoyan.

VII

TWO LETTERS TO A. M. GORKY*

I

DEAR ALEXEI MAXIMOVICH!

Whatever are you up to? It's simply dreadful! Really!

Yesterday I read in *Ryech* your answer to the "howl" about Dostoyevsky and was ready to rejoice; but to-day the liquidationist newspaper arrived, and it contains a paragraph of your article which was not printed in *Ryech*.

This is the paragraph:

"But 'god-seeking'† should be given up, for the time being [only for the time being?]. It is a useless occupation. It is no use seeking something that has not been hidden. Without sowing you cannot reap. You have no god, you have not yet—[not yet!]—created him. Gods are not sought after—*they are created*; life does not invent, it creates."

It appears then, that you are opposed to "God-seeking" only for the time being!! It appears then, that you are opposed to God-seeking *only* in order to substitute God-creating for it!!

Now! Is it not dreadful to think that *you* should reason in this way?

* Lenin's letter was called forth by the appearance of an article by A. M. Gorky, "The Karamazov Episode" in *Russkoye Slovo* (*Russian Word*), No. 219, October 5th (September 22nd), 1913, protesting against the dramatisation of Dostoyevsky's reactionary novel, *Devils* by the Moscow Art Theatre. The bourgeois press and an important group of writers came out against Gorky's protest, with a "howl" for Dostoyevsky, as Lenin expressed it, in the evening edition of the *Financial News* (*Birzhevoye Vyedomosty*). Gorky answered in a new article, "The Karamazov Episode Again," in *Russkoye Slovo*, No. 248, November 9th (October 27th). Large extracts from Gorky's answer were printed in *Ryech*, November 10th (October 28th), without the concluding paragraph referred to in Lenin's Letter of November 11th (October 29th); Gorky's article was reprinted in full in the *Novaya Rabochaya Gazeta* (*New Workers' Paper*), No. 69, November 11th (October 29th). Lenin devoted three letters to Gorky's article, one of which was a small letter containing only a few lines. This letter, as are the other two, is included in the *Lenin Collection*, I, pp. 145-151, and was not printed by the editors in the *Collected Works*. The first letter, in which Lenin comes out against the God-creating of Gorky, is printed in full. The second letter, printed in this volume, begins with the fifth page. The first four pages of the letter were not at the disposal of the editors of the *Collected Works*. This letter is evidently an answer to a letter from Gorky, stimulated by Lenin's criticism.

When the article "The Karamazov Episode Again" was reprinted in the collection *Articles from 1905 to 1916*, published by "Parus" (Petrograd, 1918), Gorky omitted the concluding paragraphs on God-creating which had called for the "furious" attack of Lenin.

The novel mentioned at the end of the first letter was a novel by V. Voitinsky (pseudonym, C. Petrov) sent to the editorial office of *Prosveshcheniye*. The novel was not approved by Gorky.

† During the period of reaction a section of the Bolsheviks, prominent among whom were Lunacharsky and Gorky, gave way to religious moods and developed a philosophy that was known as "god seeking" or "god creating."

There is as much difference between God-seeking, God-building, God-creating and God-begetting, etc., as there is between a yellow devil and a blue devil. To speak of God-seeking, not in order to oppose *all* devils and gods, all ideological corpse-worshipping (every little god, even the purest, most ideal, not sought for, but conceived little god, is corpse worshipping)—but simply to choose between a blue devil and a yellow one—that is a hundred times worse than not speaking about it at all.

In the freest countries, in countries where an appeal " to the democracy, to the people, to public opinion and to science " is *totally* out of place—in such countries, America, Switzerland, etc., the minds of the people and of the workers are stultified by precisely this idea of a pure, spiritually conceived little god. That is why all religious ideas, all ideas about any little god, even of flirting with a little god are an unspeakable abomination and one particularly tolerated (frequently even desired) by the *democratic* bourgeoisie precisely because it is the most dangerous abomination—the most disgusting " contamination." The crowd is much more able to see through millions of *physical* sins, dirty tricks, violences and infections which are therefore much less dangerous than is the *subtle*, spiritual idea of the little god arrayed in the smartest of " ideological " costumes. A Catholic priest who violates young girls (about whom I happened to read just now in a German newspaper) is *much less* dangerous to " democracy " than are priests who do not wear surplices, priests without vulgar religion, ideological and democratic priests, who preach the creation and making of little gods. The first type of priest can be *easily* exposed, condemned, and driven out —but the second *cannot* be driven out so simply. It is a thousand times more difficult to expose *him*; since not a single " frail and pitifully weak " philistine will agree to " condemn " him.

And you, knowing the " frailty and pitiful weakness " of the Russian (why Russian? Is the Italian better?) philistine soul, bewilder this soul with an attractive looking sweatmeat wrapped in gaudy tinsel which contains at the heart of its sugary hodge-podge a deadly poison.

Really, this is dreadful!

" Enough now of self-castigation, which with us takes the place of self-criticism."

Is not God-building the *worst* form of self-castigation? Everyone engaged in building *God* or even merely conceiving of God-building, *castigates* himself in the worst possible way, because instead of occupying himself with " deeds " he indulges in self-contemplation, self-admiration and moreover " contemplates " the dirtiest, most stupid, and most servile features of his own " ego " glorified by self-love into a god of his own building.

From the social and impersonal point of view, *all* God-building is the *adoring* self-contemplation of a dull, frail philistinism—a dreamy " self-castigation " of the " despondent and weary " philistine and petty-bourgeois (as you said very truly about the *soul*—only you should not have said the " Russian " soul, but the *petty-bourgeois*, because the Jewish, the Italian and the English petty-bourgeois are all the same). Rotten philistinism is disgusting always, but " democratic philistinism," engaged in its ideological corpse worship, is especially disgusting.

Reading your article attentively, and *trying* to find out how this *slip* occurred, I confess that I am at a loss. What is this? Remnants of the " Confession " of which *you yourself* disapproved? An echo of it?

Or else—perhaps, it is an unsuccessful attempt *to bend* to the *general democratic* point of view instead of to the *proletarian* point of view? Perhaps, in speaking to " democracy in general " you thought it necessary (excuse the expression) to prattle as one does in speaking to children? Perhaps in order to " speak in popular language," to the petty-bourgeoisie, you felt it necessary to make a momentary concession to its prejudices?

But is not this approach wrong in every way, and in every sense?

I said above that in *democratic* countries it is totally out of place for a proletarian writer to appeal to " democracy, the people, public opinion and science." But what about Russia? Even in Russia such an appeal is not quite in place, because there too it would sound like flattering petty-bourgeois prejudices. Even Izgoyev of *Russkaya Mysl** would willingly subscribe to a vague general appeal. What is the use of issuing slogans which may be very easy for *you* to distinguish from Izgoyevism *but* which it would be impossible for

* *Russian Thought*, a monthly magazine which supported the imperialist strivings of the big Russian capitalists.—*Ed.*

the *reader* so to distinguish? Why make up democratic bouquets for the reader instead of making a *clear* distinction between the *petty-bourgeoisie* (frail, pitiful, wavering, weak, weary, despondent, God-contemplating, self-contemplating, God-building, God-begetting, self-castigating, *helplessly-anarchistic*—excellent expression!!—etc., etc.) and the *proletariat* (intelligent, not phrase-bound, able to distinguish between *bourgeois* "science and public opinion" and their own, between bourgeois democracy and proletarian)?

Why ever did you do it?

It is devilishly vexing.

Yours, V. U.

P.S.—I have sent the novel by registered post. Have you received it?

P.P.S.—Take medical treatment, I mean it seriously, so that you may travel in the winter *without catching cold* (it is dangerous to travel in winter).

Yours, V. ULYANOV.

(Written in the middle of November, 1913. Printed first in 1924 in the *Lenin Collection*, I.)

II

On the question of God, the divine, and all connected therewith, you contradict yourself—the same contradiction I think which I pointed out to you in our conversations at our last meeting at Capri. You had broken away (or appeared to have broken away) from the "Vperyodists,"* without grasping clearly the ideological basis of "Vperyodism."

The same is true in the present case. You are "vexed," you say, and you "cannot understand how the phrase 'for the time being' slipped in." And yet, at the same time, you defend the idea of God and of God-building!

"God is a complex of those ideas, worked out by tribes, by nations, by humanity at large, which arouse and organize the social emotions,

* The supporters of the journal *Vperyo* (*Forward*) issued by the so-called "left Bolsheviks," Lunacharsky, Bogadanov, etc., in 1908-1917. This must not be confused with the *Vperyod* published by the Bolsheviks in 1904 after the *Iskra* passed into the hands of the Mensheviks.—*Ed.*

and which serve to unite the individual with society, and to curb zoological individualism."

This theory is obviously of a piece with the theory, or the guess of Bogdanov and Lunacharsky.

And it is obviously wrong, and obviously reactionary. Like the Christian Socialists (the sorriest sort of "Socialism" and its vilest perversion) you employ a trick which (in spite of your best intentions) is on all fours with the hocus-pocus of the priests. All that has in actual practice been *historically* and socially associated with the idea of God (bedevilment, irrational prejudice, and the glorification of ignorance and wretchedness, on the one hand,—and serfdom and the monarchy, on the other), are eliminated while in place of this historical and social reality is inserted a nice little petty-bourgeois phrase (God = "the idea which arouses and organizes social emotions").

By this you mean something "Good and Beautiful," "Truth," "Justice," and all that sort of thing. But what you intended remains an intention—your own subjective "innocent desire." Your words being written went to the *masses* and their *meaning* was determined, not by these your good intentions, but by the *correlation of social forces*—by the definite objective inter-relation of classes. Consequently these relations being what they are (whether you wish it or do not), what you have actually done has been to embellish and sweeten the idea of the clericals, of Purishkevich, of Nicholas II and Struve. Because *actually* the idea of God helps *them* to keep the people in slavery. By redecorating the idea of God you actually repaired the chains by which the ignorant workers and peasants are bound. "There!"—Messrs. Parson and Co. will say—"see what a fine and wise idea (idea of God) this is! Even '*your*' democrats, your leaders, admit it; and we (Messrs. Parson and Co.) are the ministers of this idea."

It is not true to say that God is a complex of the ideas which arouse and organize the social emotions. This is Bogdanovian *idealism*, which obscures the material origin of ideas. God is (historically and socially) first of all a complex of ideas engendered by the ignorance of mankind, and by its subjection, firstly beneath the forces of nature, secondly by class-oppression—ideas which *perpetuate* this ignorance and damp down the class struggle. There was a

time in history when, in spite of this origin, and this the real meaning of the idea of God, the democratic and proletarian struggle took the form of a struggle of *one religious* idea against another.

But this time has long been past.

Now in Europe, just as in Russia, *every* defence or justification of the idea of God, even the most refined and well intentioned, is a justification of reaction.

Your definition—God is a complex of ideas which " arouse and organize social emotions and serve to unite the individual with society, to curb zoological individualism "—is thoroughly reactionary and completely bourgeois.

Why is it reactionary ? Because it re-vivifies the clerical-servile idea of " curbing " zoology. As a matter of fact " zoological individualism " has never been curbed by the idea of God. It was " curbed " by the primitive herd, and the primitive commune. The idea of God has *always* lulled and blunted " social emotions," and substituted concern for the dead for interest in the living. It has *always* involved the idea of slavery (of the worst and most hopeless slavery). The idea of God has never " united the individual with society." It has always bound the oppressed *classes* by faith in the divinity to submission to their oppressors.

Your definition is bourgeois (and unscientific and unhistorical) because it deals with general, " Robinson Crusoe " conceptions—and not with definite *classes* situated in a definite historical epoch.

The idea of God, of the Syrian and similar savage tribes (and semi-savage as well), is one thing ; that of Struve and Co. is quite another. In both cases, however, this idea is fostered by class-rule, and in each case it fosters that rule in return. " The popular " conception of little gods and of the Divine is the result of " popular " ignorance, exactly as is the " popular " conception of the Tsar, of goblins, of dragging wives by the hair. How you can call the " popular " conception of God a " democratic " one is absolutely beyond me.

It is not true to say that philosophical idealism " always has in view only the interests of the individual." Did Descartes have the interests of the individual more in mind than Gassendi ? Or Fichte and Hegel more than Feuerbach ?

" God creating is the process of the further development and accumulation of social principles in the individual and in society "

—this is positively terrible ! ! If there were freedom in Russia, the whole bourgeoisie would have praised you for a sociology and theology so utterly bourgeois as this !

Well, enough for the present ; this letter is too long as it is. Again I press your hand warmly, and wish you good health.

Yours,

V. U.

(Written in December, 1913. First printed in 1924 in the *Lenin Collection*, I.)

VIII

ON COMMUNIST AND RELIGIOUS ETHICS

From a speech given to the Third All-Russian Congress of the Young Communist League by the Soviet Union, Oct. 3rd, 1920.

. . . First of all, I shall deal here with the question of Communist ethics.

You must train yourselves to be Communists. The task of the Young Communist League is to organize its practical activity in such a manner that in studying, in organizing and consolidating itself, and in fighting on, it will be training itself and all those who regard it as their leader. It will thus be training Communists. The whole work of training, educating, and instructing the present-day youth must be directed towards imbuing them with Communist ethics.

But is there such a thing as Communist ethics ? Is there such a thing as Communist morality ? Of course there is. It is frequently asserted that we have no ethics, and very frequently the bourgeoisie says that we Communists deny all morality. That is one of their methods of confusing the issue, of throwing dust into the eyes of the workers and peasants.

In what sense do we deny ethics, morals ?

In the sense in which they are preached by the bourgeoisie, a sense which deduces these morals from God's commandments. Of course,

we say that we do not believe in God. We know perfectly well that the clergy, the landlords, and the bourgeoisie all claimed to speak in the name of God, in order to protect their own interests as exploiters. Or, instead of deducing their ethics from the commandments of morality, from the commandments of God, they deduced them from idealistic or semi-idealistic phrases which in substance were always very similar to divine commandments.

We deny all morality taken from superhuman or non-class conceptions. We say that this is a deception, a swindle, a befogging of the minds of the workers and peasants in the interests of the landlords and capitalists.

We say that our morality is wholly subordinated to the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat. We deduce our morality from the facts and needs of the class struggle of the proletariat.

The old society was based on the oppression of all the workers and peasants by the landlords and capitalists. We had to destroy this society. We had to overthrow these landowners and capitalists. But to do this, organization was necessary. God could not create such organization.

Such organization could only be created by the factories and workshops, only by the trained proletariat, awakened from its former slumber. Only when this class had come into existence did the mass movement commence which led to what we have to-day —to the victory of the proletarian revolution in one of the weakest countries in the world—a country which for three years has resisted the attacks of the bourgeoisie of the whole world. We see how the proletarian revolution is growing all over the whole world. And we can say now, on the basis of experience, that only the proletariat could have created that compact force which is carrying along with it the once disunited and disorganized peasantry—a force which has withstood all the attacks of all the exploiters. Only this class can help the toiling masses to unite their forces, to close their ranks, to establish and build up a definitely Communist society and finally to complete it.

That is why we say that a morality taken from outside of human society does not exist for us; it is a fraud. For us morality is subordinated to the interests of the proletarian class struggle. . . .

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